



# News Release

**For immediate release:** June 11, 2009

(09-100)

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## **Swine flu (H1N1): emergency rule requires hospitalization reporting in state**

*World Health Organization raises pandemic alert level — little effect in Washington*

**OLYMPIA** — Today's declaration of a "phase six pandemic" by the World Health Organization doesn't change the swine flu strategy in Washington or the United States. North America was affected early in the outbreak, and tracking, monitoring, prevention, and response work has been under way ever since. The term "pandemic" means that a disease outbreak is occurring on multiple continents around the world at the same time. It doesn't indicate that a disease is stronger or more severe.

"We've been on the leading edge of the outbreak because it came to the nation and our state early," said Secretary of Health Mary Selecky. "We've been doing the important work of monitoring this strain of flu in our communities. Now, we're focusing on the most severe cases — hospitalized patients and fatal cases. Both swine flu and seasonal flu can be serious for some people, so we want people to take it seriously, but keep the risk in perspective and take precautions to prevent illness."

State health officials briefed the state Board of Health yesterday on a plan to adopt an emergency rule to require hospitals to report when people are admitted with illnesses caused by swine flu. The Department of Health filed the rule today, and the new virus is listed as one of the state's notifiable conditions, effective immediately.

Hospitals and healthcare providers are being notified that they're now required to report these cases to local public health agencies.

Hospitals will be required to report for 120 days under the emergency rule. The reporting requirement may be extended.

The new swine flu's symptoms are similar to those of other flu types. So, the Department of Health says these cases become reportable only when test results confirm the illness is due to the new virus. One exception is an outbreak of influenza-like illness in institutional settings such as nursing homes — already reportable even without specific testing.

State health officials are working with the Washington State Hospital Association, which supports the rule because it will help the state track this new strain of swine flu. One goal is to assure that reporting is required for only as long as necessary to confirm that this influenza strain is no stronger than the common flu. Another is to keep a watch for widespread transmission in the next influenza season.

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Visit the Washington Department of Health Web site at <a href="http://www.doh.wa.gov">http://www.doh.wa.gov</a> for <i>a healthy dose of information</i> .
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